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at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. KITTIKHOUN	(Lao People's Democratic Republic)
later:	(Ms. LEONCE-CARRYL) (Vice-Chairman)	(Saint Lucia)
later:	Mr. KITTIKHOUN	(Lao People's Democratic Republic)

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 84: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/51/13, A/51/369, A/51/370, A/51/371, A/51/439, A/51/476, A/51/495, A/51/509, A/50/915-S/1996/235; A/C.4/51/L.12 to L.18)

1. Mr. AL-THANI (Qatar) said that consideration should be given to supplementing contributions with fixed resources with a view to ensuring that UNRWA was not reliant on contributions for 90 per cent of its revenues. In that connection, he shared the Working Group's feeling that the General Assembly should be more actively engaged than in previous years in ensuring that UNRWA was given the resources it needed to fulfil its mandate, particularly in view of the natural growth of the refugee population and the worsening socio-economic situation in the Agency's area of operations. The outlook for Palestinian refugees was now less optimistic than in 1995, in view of the uncertainty surrounding the peace process because of the failure of the new Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations under the agreements signed between the Palestinians and the former Israeli Government.

2. UNRWA had been obliged to take emergency action to counter the adverse socio-economic repercussions of the arbitrary measures adopted by the Israeli authorities, in particular the extended closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel bore full responsibility for the consequences of such measures, which could not be justified on the pretext of security. Hope for the achievement of a rapid and just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem would be renewed only if the peace process emerged from the current crisis, and that depended on Israel's fulfilment of its agreed obligations.

3. Mr. MANSOUR (Lebanon) said that his Government fully supported UNRWA, whose role was vital in Lebanon. The socio-economic conditions of the Palestine refugees remained precarious, and they were a heavy burden for Lebanon, which was hosting the largest number of them. Intensive humanitarian assistance was required from the international community to improve the living conditions and relieve their suffering until a just and comprehensive solution was reached in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. Lebanon considered that the presence of Palestine refugees in its territory was temporary and was a consequence of Israeli occupation and the continuation of the Middle East crisis. Lebanon's position was clear and firm in that respect. In accordance with the Lebanese Constitution of 1989, Lebanon rejected any settlement of refugees in its territory.

4. Lebanon was very concerned about the financial situation of UNRWA, which was the only provider of services to refugees in Lebanon. In the long run the budgetary and financial crisis would lead to a deterioration of the living conditions of the refugees and could have very serious repercussions and a destabilizing effect on the peace process in the Middle East. His Government appreciated the efforts made by the Commissioner-General to increase the number of donors.

5. Lebanon had opposed the transfer of the headquarters of UNRWA to Gaza because it knew that the Agency would not be able to operate normally under the

conditions of Israeli occupation. The transfer had hindered the Agency's work, to the detriment of Palestine refugees in Lebanon.

6. The lives of hundreds of thousands of refugees depended on UNRWA. Until a global, just and equitable solution was found to the refugee problem, the Agency should concentrate entirely on relief and humanitarian assistance, and should not become involved in development projects.

7. Mr. PARNOHADININGRAT (Indonesia) expressed appreciation to UNRWA for its assistance to Palestine refugees. His delegation was pleased that UNRWA had relocated its headquarters to the occupied territories; its presence would undoubtedly contribute to better coordination and more efficient monitoring of projects and activities, and would serve as a stabilizing factor in the region and promote the peace process.

8. Indonesia was heartened by the holding of the first Palestinian elections, with substantial support from UNRWA. The inaugural session of the Palestinian Council gave rise to renewed hopes for peace and strengthened the partnership between the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA, paving the way for better technical coordination to provide assistance to the Palestine refugee community.

9. The Peace Implementation Programme had transformed the goals of the peace process into tangible benefits for the people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Lebanon. His delegation was pleased to note that under that programme, the bulk of the funds would be allocated to projects in the West Bank and Gaza.

10. It was disturbing that an atmosphere of tension and insecurity prevailed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip because of the prolonged closures imposed by the Israeli authorities. At a crucial moment in the fragile peace process, the Agency's role in improving economic and social conditions was of the utmost importance.

11. His delegation shared the concern about the dire financial crisis faced by UNRWA and was gratified to note that UNRWA was considering a number of innovative approaches to expand its traditional donor base. The Palestine refugees needed increased assistance until a just, lasting and comprehensive peace was achieved. It was self-evident that without adequate funding, the Agency's tasks would be rendered infinitely more difficult.

12. Ms. CARAYANIDES (Australia) said that her delegation acknowledged the central role played by UNRWA in promoting social and economic development in the occupied territories and elsewhere in the region; for peace to take root, there must be economic development and an improvement in the quality of life of ordinary Palestinians. The Agency's social and humanitarian work had been a significant factor in helping to reduce social and economic frustrations, with their potential to exacerbate political tensions in the area.

13. The extended closures in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and restrictions on the freedom of movement of Agency staff were having a significant impact on the Agency's ability to carry out its work and on its management and efficiency at a time when the Agency was facing serious financial difficulties. While

security concerns must be respected, her delegation hoped that the restrictions could be quickly resolved so that the Agency could carry out its important work and limits on economic and social development could be lifted.

14. Australia was concerned about the financial difficulties experienced by UNRWA, and welcomed the Commissioner-General's efforts to expand the Agency's donor base. It encouraged countries which had not been traditional donors, particularly wealthier countries in the region, to consider carefully the implications of not extending financial support to UNRWA at a crucial time in the Agency's operations. Australia, despite growing demands on limited funds, had maintained its contributions to the Agency's budget; its assistance to UNRWA and to Palestine refugees had totalled $7.8 million in 1995-1996 and had been provided through a range of mechanisms. Australia also welcomed the Commissioner-General's willingness to pursue reforms within the Agency, including greater focus on priority activities, regular dialogue on questions of management review and structural reform, streamlining of operations, and harmonization of services between UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority. It was pleased that UNRWA was cooperating effectively with the Palestinian Authority; the Agency's expertise would be an important asset in the process of enhancing capabilities and institution building which should be taken forward.

15. Only a comprehensive peace settlement would resolve the refugee issue, and until then, UNRWA would play a vital role in assisting Palestine refugees. Australia urged the two sides to renew their determination to achieve progress towards a secure, lasting and comprehensive peace and to fulfil their commitments and implement their agreements.

16. Mr. AL-ZAYANI (Bahrain) said that the Palestinian refugee problem formed an essential part of the question of Palestine, which lay at the heart of the Middle East problem. Over the years, UNRWA had become the main agency providing vital assistance to Palestinian refugees with a view to improving their socio-economic situation. The structural deficit which it now faced was therefore a source of profound concern, particularly since the efforts which it had always made to reduce the impact of its financial difficulties were no longer capable of countering the accumulated deficit. Indeed, the situation was unsustainable unless announced contributions were immediately paid. He was nevertheless confident that, with help from the international community, UNRWA would succeed in overcoming its current financial crisis. Until a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem was found, its contribution would continue to be indispensable. He therefore urged full support for UNRWA, the more so since the problems faced by Palestinian refugees were likely to grow more acute in view of the current stumbling block in the peace process.

17. Mr. CASSAR (Malta) said that Malta associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union and associated States.

18. UNRWA could not be viewed in a vacuum: its achievements were heavily dependent on the environment in which it operated. The report of the Commissioner-General (A/51/13) detailed the hardships faced on the ground, and particularly the impact of recent developments. The deteriorating situation

gave cause for concern, and prolonged the suffering of Palestine refugees. Since its inception, UNRWA had been a beacon of hope for millions of refugees. Its activities benefited not only the refugees, but also the creation and consolidation of services in areas under the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. Moving the Agency's headquarters to Gaza had enhanced the Agency's role; savings accrued from that should not serve as a pretext to deny the Agency urgently needed funds. Further cost-cutting and austerity carried great risks, above all diminished service where and when required most.

19. The restrictions placed on the Agency's operations and on the movement of its personnel were detrimental to continuity of services and the well-being of the Palestine refugees. The socio-economic hardships resulting from the border closures impaired the international community's humanitarian effort, even though the Agency was continuing to provide services under temporary employment schemes.

20. The Agency had not abandoned its focus, particularly on the more vulnerable. In all areas of its work, community participation in projects increased their benefits and was crucial to their success. Harmonization of services with the Palestinian Authority was a determining factor. The Peace Implementation Programme was a significant source of investment in terms of the infrastructure and in developing human resources through the engagement of Palestinian people and assets. His Government believed that at a crucial stage of the peace process, countries which had undertaken to finance the development of the region now under Palestinian control should translate those pledges into action, thereby eliminating threats to the process itself and to political stability in the region.

21. Malta remained steadfast in its commitment to a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The optimism of only a few months back must be rekindled. Neither the parties concerned nor the international community could afford to forsake the path to peace. That required the full implementation of agreements reached and the will to overcome obstacles.

22. Mr. WAIENG (Papua New Guinea) said that Papua New Guinea shared the concern of other delegations about the critical financial situation facing UNRWA and called on the international community to continue its support to the Palestinian people, honour the commitments made at the pledging conference in September 1996, and approach the forthcoming pledging conference in a positive manner. Over the past year, there had been many developments that provided a positive environment for peace and security in the Middle East. The holding of elections for the Palestinian Council and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority were important steps towards the realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. His delegation was gravely concerned that the new Israeli Government's attitude and approaches to key elements of the peace process could seriously jeopardize the achievements made so far. It hoped that the parties concerned would be able to adhere to earlier agreements in order to attain the ultimate goals of the Palestinian people and Israeli citizens to live in peace and harmony. It hoped that the new Israeli Government would refrain from any provocative moves that would endanger peace and would work within the principles and norms of international law.

23. The international community must contribute adequate resources to UNRWA, in order to avoid any serious deterioration of services that could further derail the goals of achieving peace and security in the region. Papua New Guinea would do all it could within its limited financial capacity to support the ongoing operations of the Agency. Continuous support by the international community in defending the rights of the Palestine refugees and eventually consolidating them in their homeland was an important part of the peace process.

24. Mr. HANSEN (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that it was gratifying that an unprecedented number of delegations had participated in the debate on UNRWA and had shown an understanding of the very difficult financial situation faced by the Agency. He wished to clarify a few points. The Peace Implementation Programme was not designed to resolve the Palestine refugee problem; the objective was to better the lot of the refugees and show them what they would gain from peace. When the Agency had had to reduce the distribution of certain food items to special hardship cases, that had been interpreted by the people concerned as a withdrawal of the international community, when the reality was that UNRWA was too short of resources to provide those commodities. The Agency's consideration of the possibility of providing cash payments instead of commodities was not a sign that it wanted to withdraw from the region, but resulted from policy considerations in the European Union. UNRWA would try to provide assistance that was sufficient for those in real need. There was no premeditated plan for curtailing services or for eliminating them altogether. He looked forward to a positive outcome of the pledging conference to be held in December 1996.

AGENDA ITEM 85: REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (A/51/99 and Add.1-2, A/51/310, A/51/407, A/51/411, A/51/429, A/51/514, A/51/516, A/51/517, A/51/518, A/50/915; A/C.4/51/L.19-L.23)

25. Mr. DE SILVA (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chairman of the Special Committee, introduced its report (A/51/99/Add.2) and the accompanying periodic reports (A/51/99 and Add.1), covering the period from August 1995 to September 1996. The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (the Oslo II Accord) had engendered high expectations, and that there had in fact been positive developments like the withdrawal of the Israeli army from six West Bank cities beginning in October 1995. Sadly, however, the overall human rights situation in the occupied territories had deteriorated, owing in large part to Israel's sealing off of the territories in the wake of suicide bomb attacks in Israel. Some of the policies of the current Israeli Government, and the flare-up of violence in September 1996, were further sources of serious concern.

26. Israel had regrettably continued to withhold cooperation from the Special Committee itself, which had thus had to base the findings for its report on indirect sources. The Committee had focused on policy statements by the new Government and on its application of various forms of collective punishment, repugnant under any civilized system of criminal justice and bespeaking a hostility to a whole people. The Committee had also dwelt on measures affecting the right to life and physical integrity and other fundamental freedoms, on the

administration of justice and the treatment of detainees, and on a whole cluster of issues like land confiscation and the expansion of settlements and road links or the behaviour of settlers, which needed to be resolved if there was going to be lasting peace in the region.

27. With regard to the situation of human rights in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, illegally annexed by Israel, the Special Committee had found that freedom of expression and of movement remained curtailed and land and water resources continued to be confiscated, that arbitrary curfews had been imposed and that the inhabitants had been subjected to violence or provocation.

28. The human rights situation in the occupied territories had worsened markedly, and even in the areas where there had been a transfer of limited power to the Palestinian Authority, there had been no improvement in the lot of the Palestinian people. Israel's imposition of closure after the bomb attacks in February 1996 had had particularly dire consequences for the Gaza Strip, and had brought the economy of the occupied territories to a practical standstill. In addition, for the first time, with the imposition of what amounted to an internal blockade on about 500 Arab villages in the West Bank, movement had been blocked within the occupied territories themselves. By far the most serious consequence of the virtually hermetic sealing off of the occupied territories was the significant deterioration of economic and social conditions, with a reported 60-per-cent unemployment rate and nearly 60,000 Palestinian workers prevented from reaching their places of employment in Israel, shortages of imported staple goods, the interruption of all imports and consequent business closings, and bleak prospects generally for business. The closure had also had a disastrous impact on the health of the inhabitants, given the restrictions on the movements of both patients and medical personnel, and had resulted in some deaths. The harassment and even beating of Palestinians at checkpoints was indicative of a culture of sadism. Education had also been affected by the closure, since students were being prevented from travelling between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, others had been arrested in dormitory police raids, and some Islamic educational organizations and publications had been banned in Jerusalem and Hebron. The closure had, furthermore, restricted the access of worshippers to Moslem and Christian holy sites, especially in Jerusalem, and a number of mosques in the West Bank had reportedly been raided and closed.

29. The conditions of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention facilities had reportedly deteriorated sharply since the signing of the Oslo II Accord, in terms of overcrowding, poor food, inadequate medical care, lack of access to families and lawyers, and also the sanctioned use by the General Security Services of interrogation methods which amounted to aggravated forms of torture. Alleged sympathizers of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements suspected of connection with the suicide bomb attacks had been arrested together with their families and a number of them placed in administrative detention. Extrajudicial killings were also alleged to have continued to take place.

30. The demolition of houses had proceeded, particularly in East Jerusalem, apparently with the aim of eliminating the Palestinian presence there; thousands of Palestinians in Jerusalem had, furthermore, routinely lost their residency status after any time spent abroad. One of the most disquieting policies of the new Israeli Government, which might pose the biggest threat to the peace

process, was its decision in August 1996 to end the four-year freeze on the construction of settlements, the automatic consequence of which was the confiscation of Palestinian-owned land for the building of new settlements and for tunnels and roads interlinking them, especially around Jerusalem.

31. A subject of utmost concern to the Special Committee was the Israeli decision to open an archaeological tunnel beneath the Temple Mount, which had been viewed as a grave provocation by Muslims throughout the world and had sparked the worst fighting between Israelis and Palestinians since the beginning of the peace process, in which the Israeli army had responded with excessive force and incursions into the self-rule areas under exclusive Palestinian control.

32. It was vital that a dialogue be maintained between the parties and that the peace process continue. Both parties should respect the letter and spirit of the Oslo II Accord and immediately resume the peace talks. Both should demonstrate their commitment to the agreements they had signed thus far, and should develop confidence-building measures, such as the redeployment of the Israeli army in Hebron, the release of Palestinian detainees, the lifting of the closure, an immediate halt in the expansion of settlements and land confiscation, and the closing of the Western Wall Tunnel. Such moves would revitalize peace negotiations and generate a spirit of reconciliation.

33. Ms. NASSER (Observer for Palestine) said that the ongoing practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories threatened the existence of the peace process and the stability of the region as a whole. At the forefront of Israel's punitive, harsh and illegal policies and practices was the closure of the Palestinian territory, which in reality meant the obstruction of the freedom of movement of persons and goods within the West Bank, between the West Bank and Jerusalem, between the West Bank and Gaza, and between the Palestinian territory as a whole and Israel and the outside world. Israel had reneged on the economic agreement between the two sides by preventing Palestinian workers from reaching their places of employment. Such actions not only damaged the Palestinian economy and dismembered Palestinian integrity but also violated the fundamental freedoms of movement, worship and education.

34. In the past year, Israel had also continued to carry out a whole set of practices and measures that violated the human rights of the Palestinian people. Such practices included harassment, physical ill-treatment, summary executions, assassinations and several forms of collective punishment, including the demolition of homes and the imposition of curfews. Moreover, political prisoners, many of whom had been subjected to torture, remained imprisoned in Israeli jails.

35. Israel had continually attempted to change the situation on the ground, in violation of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the agreements reached between the two sides. In Jerusalem, Israel had demolished the building of the Burj al-Laqlaq Society in August 1996, and had opened a tunnel in the vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which it had kept open in complete violation of Security Council resolution 1073 (1996). Moreover, the current Israeli Government had also decided to resume its colonization campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The influx of new settlers

was accompanied by the confiscation of land and the abuse and exploitation of natural resources. The frequent belligerent and violent behaviour of those illegal settlers remained a source of great tension and endangered the lives of Palestinians. Clearly, there could not be a peace process as long as Israel continued to colonize the occupied territories. Furthermore, in order to salvage that process, Israel must redeploy from Al-Khalil (Hebron) in accordance with the agreement reached, implement all other overdue provisions of the agreements and begin negotiations on the final settlement.

36. Her delegation regretted that the Israeli authorities had refused to cooperate with the Special Committee, and considered that Israel should immediately agree to do so. Moreover, it was imperative that the Israeli Government should accept the de jure applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to all of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. While her delegation hoped that the current situation would soon change, it considered that, until that time, the United Nations should take a stronger position and provide the necessary support for the Special Committee and its valuable work.

37. Mr. Al-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, as detailed in the report of the Special Committee, Israel continued to implement its policy concerning the annexation and settlement of Arab land, while its repressive practices against Arab inhabitants increased daily. Ever since the Syrian Arab Golan was occupied in 1967, the annexation, settlement and Judaization of the land had continued unceasingly, as had the confiscation of Arab property and the detention, imprisonment and repression of Arab citizens. Although such practices were in breach of all international instruments and values, Israel none the less persisted in the pursuit of its expansionist policy, to which end it had also enacted legislation that had enabled it to seize 80 per cent of the total area of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, which currently housed some 30,000 Israeli settlements. Meanwhile, the Syrian Arab inhabitants continued to suffer all manner of persecution, oppression and repression.

38. In the light of such facts, he questioned the future of the peace process, not to mention the principle of land for peace. It was patently clear that Israel did not want a just and comprehensive peace, as that would neither serve its aspirations, nor enable it to retain control over the occupied Arab territories. Given that its practices and policies were not conducive to peace, he urged greater effort and vigilance on the part of the international community and the Special Committee. For its part, his Government was willing to continue providing all the facilities needed to enable the Special Committee to fulfil its task.

39. Mr. HIROSE (Japan), noting that progress in the Middle East peace process had been made possible by the persistent efforts of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority, said that recent developments in the region, however, were not encouraging. Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had aroused profound concern; the issue of Hebron was not settled. The parties must strive to bridge the chasm of mistrust that separated them by refraining from any action that could spark further violence,

observe the commitments they had already made as part of the peace process, and intensify good-faith efforts to pursue it.

40. Japan itself was determined to help create an environment conducive to peace: a special envoy had been sent to Egypt, Israel and the Gaza Strip to convey its ideas on advancing the process, and his Government had taken an active part in multilateral talks on the question. Japan had also given $230 million in assistance to the Palestinians, and had just decided to provide a further $3.5 million to a World Bank fund to assist the Palestinian Authority.

41. Japan believed that the draft resolution the Committee had adopted on the question should accurately reflect current developments and not be provocative to any of the parties.

42. Ms. RUBINSTEIN (Israel) said that, in the past year, significant progress had been made in the Middle East region. The Israel Defence Forces had redeployed from six West Bank cities, transferring to the Palestinian Council full responsibility over those cities and their inhabitants. At the same time, the Israel Defence Forces had redeployed from other areas in the West Bank. In those areas, the Palestinian National Council was responsible for all aspects of Palestinian daily life: economy, commerce, industry, health, education, culture and internal security.

43. Israel and the Palestinians had assumed the task of ending the conflict through dialogue and face-to-face negotiations and had established many mechanisms for institutional cooperation in various civil spheres, in military matters and in judicial and economic affairs. Their cooperation in the area of security had led to a good deal of success in locating criminals and members of terrorist organizations. Together, Israelis and Palestinians had realized that they could not solve their differences through armed conflict and had chosen the path of peace over that of confrontation. They would continue on that path until a permanent settlement acceptable to both sides was reached.

44. The Special Committee's report was a prime example of needless involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That distorted report only degraded the integrity of the Organization, and her delegation had no intention of discussing it. However, she wished to draw attention to the fact that, while it included a list of Palestinians killed by Israelis during the reporting period, the report did not mention the Israeli citizens who had been murdered during the same period by Palestinian suicide bombers. Such acts of terror had brought about the virtual cessation of the peace process in March 1996, when the former Government of Israel was still in power. However, after a brief pause in the peace process, the Government of Israel had decided to proceed with the peace process. Since that time, there had been successful cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security services, which had resulted in the capture of many of those responsible for terrorist acts.

45. Israel was committed to continuing its vital relations with Egypt, Jordan and Morocco. Its Government appreciated the contributions that President Mubarak, King Hussein and King Hassan had made to the peace process, and was pleased that hundreds of Jordanians visited Israel every day. Such contacts would help encourage the development of commercial and economic ties to

the benefit of both nations. The Cairo summit, which had taken place in November 1996, and the previous economic summits of Amman and Casablanca, as well as the summit to be held in Qatar in 1997, were an essential means of establishing a network of economic relations between private companies and business people throughout the region.

46. Israel was also concerned about the Palestinians' economic welfare and, despite its security concerns, currently allowed 50,000 Palestinian workers to enter Israel from the territories. Israel was proud to be among the donors to the Palestinian Authority, along with the United States of America, Canada, Japan and the European Union. Her delegation hoped that other members of the international community, including Arab States, would assist in the development of the areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Council, since economic prosperity would eliminate radicalism and violence. Instead of adopting unnecessary political resolutions, the United Nations should endeavour to bring about a real improvement in the quality of life of the Palestinian people.

47. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that Israel had carried out systematic violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and had promoted a policy of suppressing resistance that had resulted in various human rights violations. Israel was carrying out a systematic campaign to demoralize the people of the occupied territories, particularly the Palestinians, with a view to perpetuating its illegal occupation under various pretexts.

48. Under the pretext of security, Israel had recently begun to use new means of penalizing the Palestinian people, including economic blockade and collective punishment. In recent months, Israel had frequently closed the Palestinian territories in order to obstruct movement of people and goods within the West Bank, between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and also between the area under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It had also created obstacles to the completion of infrastructural projects related to trade and other sectors of the economy. As a result of such economic warfare, the economy in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, had deteriorated significantly. His delegation strongly condemned such measures and urged the international community to persuade Israel to halt its policy of economic destruction.

49. The Israeli Government's recent decision to resume its settlement of the occupied territories had created a volatile situation. Confiscation of land and water resources had continued unabated in the occupied territories, including the Golan Heights, and indiscriminate killing and the destruction of property in southern Lebanon had become routine. His delegation wished to remind Israel that, under the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, Israel was obligated to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation.

50. His delegation was also concerned at Israel's subtle but powerful campaign to distort the image of the people of the occupied territories, branding them as terrorists bent upon endangering the security of Israel and international peace and security. That campaign must be halted immediately.

51. Israel's immediate termination of its occupation of the Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories would be a major step in reducing human rights violations. In the meantime, Israel should cooperate fully with the Special Committee and allow it to investigate the human rights situation in the occupied territories.

52. His delegation fully endorsed the Special Committee's recommendations concerning the basic human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories, and encouraged the international community to allow the Special Committee to continue its work until Israel ended its occupation of those territories. At the same time, the Secretary-General should make every effort to ensure that the Special Committee was able to fulfil its mandate.

53. Ms. Leonce-Carryl (Saint Lucia) took the Chair.

54. Mr. ALI (Sudan) said that the report of the Special Committee clearly reflected the human rights violations carried out by the Israeli Government, as well as the ensuing adverse socio-economic effects on the lives of Palestinians. It also demonstrated that the letter and spirit of the agreements between the Palestinian people and Israel calling for a just and comprehensive peace were no longer being observed. The Security Council continued to disregard Israeli practices and took no action to compel Israel to comply with its resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories. Conversely, it unjustifiably inflicted punishment on innocent parties by imposing sanctions on them for the simple reason that their policies differed from those of Israel's supporters, who manipulated the Security Council at whim.

55. In conclusion, he reiterated his Government's view that peace should be based on the principles of justice and the full safeguarding of the rights of the Palestinian people and Arab peoples in the region, as well as on fulfilment of the obligations agreed by the parties concerned. The failure to meet such obligations indicated the lack of any true desire for peace.

56. Mr. BERBASH (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his delegation greatly appreciated the work of the Special Committee, in particular its reports on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The increasing severity of Israeli practices, the growing number of innocent victims, the imposition of collective punishments on the people of the occupied territories, the annexation of land and the establishment of settlements constituted a clear violation of international resolutions. The Israelis had persisted in their policy of changing the legal status of the occupied Palestinian territories, their geographical characteristics and their demographic composition, especially in the city of Jerusalem.

57. Those actions were nullifying all the efforts of the international community to establish a just and comprehensive peace which would restore security and stability to the region. His delegation called for the condemnation of all forms of violation of human rights in the occupied territories, for an end to the arbitrary measures that were being taken against Palestinians, for respect for its political freedoms and for compliance with the wishes of the international community as expressed in numerous resolutions of the United Nations.

58. The continued policy of occupying territories by force was unacceptable and was incompatible with a just and comprehensive peace such as would ensure the liberation of all occupied Arab lands and make a reality of the rights of the Palestinian people. The establishment of an independent and democratic State in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital inhabited by both Arabs and Jews, would provide a fundamental solution to the problem and that anything less would merely prolong the suffering of the Palestinian people.

59. The ongoing task of the Special Committee in monitoring Israeli violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and other occupied Arab lands was of particular importance. His delegation reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to return to their territory, and also their right to self-determination and to establish their own independent State. It called for the release of Palestinian detainees, and for an end to the policy of eviction, the construction of settlements, and the repression of the Palestinian people.

60. Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) resumed the Chair.

61. Mr. PEHIN MOHAMMAD (Brunei Darussalam) said that recent developments had once again demonstrated Israel's territorial ambition and its determination to retain its position as an occupying Power in Arab lands in defiance of all international efforts to find a peaceful settlement. The issues between the sides should be resolved in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and should be based on the principle of "land for peace", including the return of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. In order for Israel to regain international trust and confidence, it must acknowledge the essential role of the Palestinian Authority and fulfil its commitments under the Peace Agreement.

62. The Palestinian people continued to be subjected to repression and discrimination, which included collective punishment, the demolition of houses of suspected offenders, the sealing off of areas, frequent closures of educational institutions, curfews and other restrictions. The policy of resettling Jewish citizens and new Jewish immigrants in the occupied Palestinian territories and other areas, including East Jerusalem, was a serious violation of the peace agreement. That policy had led to the displacement of Palestinians and other Arabs from their rightful homeland. In addition, 3.3 million Palestinians had sought refuge in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, which had led to a complex and volatile situation in those countries.

63. In September 1996, the Israeli leadership had shown its disrespect for holy places when it had opened a tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The violence that had ensued had claimed more than 70 lives. His delegation was concerned that such violence and aggression characterized the conduct of affairs in Palestine and that the Israeli leadership had sought to blame the violence on the Palestinians who were its principal victims.

64. His delegation urged Israel to comply with the provisions of the peace agreement and to work towards further progress in the Middle East peace process with a view to achieving a comprehensive settlement.

65. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) said that dangerous and alarming developments in the Middle East were threatening the implementation of the agreements concluded between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. There was doubt whether Israel would meet its obligations under those agreements thus strengthening the peace process and moving towards a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

66. Unfortunately, the new Government of Israel had distanced itself from the agreements reached by the previous administration, thus interrupting the peace process. The situation in the occupied territories had deteriorated and acts of repression by Israel against the Palestinians had increased.

67. It was clear from the report of the Special Committee that the continued closure of the occupied territories had substantially impaired the standard of living of the Palestinians. Economic activity had been impeded and trade had decreased significantly, thus discouraging investment. Furthermore, many Palestinians were no longer able to reach their places of employment and had been reduced to extreme poverty.

68. The new Israeli Government had reverted to the policy of establishing and expanding settlements, confiscating land and evicting the people who lived there, leaving them homeless. It was also delaying its withdrawal from Hebron, in disregard of the obligations it had undertaken in that connection, and was also continuing to impose collective punishments such as the destruction of homes, the imposition of curfews and the blockading of Palestinian towns. The report of the Special Committee also reported on the deterioration of the condition of Palestinian detainees as a result of overcrowding, lack of health care and ill-treatment.

69. The opening of the tunnel under the Western Wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem had been an act of provocation by the Israeli Government with respect to the religious feelings of the Palestinian people, and had led to outbreaks of violence that had left many dead and injured. That action designed to alter the legal status of Jerusalem was a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and flouted the resolutions of the Security Council and the agreements reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which specified that there should be discussions on the status of Jerusalem during the final status negotiations.

70. The provocative policies of Israel and the repressive measures undertaken on the pretext of reasons of security were likely to prove disastrous if they continued. Such actions only served the interests of extremists and undermined those who were working for peace. It was essential for Israel to abide by its obligations in order to save the peace process before it was too late. Israel's compliance with the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention and with other international instruments dealing with human rights was an essential condition for the establishment of a basis of trust and cooperation between all parties.

71. His delegation supported the recommendations in the report of the Special Committee and insisted that it should continue to perform its task as long as the arbitrary actions by Israel continued.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

72. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to a letter from the Chairman of the Fifth Committee in which he expressed his dismay at the tendency of other Main Committees of the General Assembly to discuss the financial implications of draft resolutions. The Chairman of the Fifth Committee had drawn attention to General Assembly resolution 45/248 D VI, in which the Assembly reaffirmed that the Fifth Committee was the appropriate Main Committee entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters. The Fifth Committee's exclusive jurisdiction in that area was also confirmed in rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.